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AUTHOR Shaff, G. M.
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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly examines the current state of library cooperation in the West African countries, in relation to the implementation of national information policies in these countries. Library cooperation within the framework of a national information policy in developing countries is considered as a primary need rather than the development of highly expensive computerized systems, which do not fit in the present economic situation in these countries where resource sharing is an essential need due to the lack of basic resources. The Standing Conference of University Libraries (Western Area) (SCAULWA) has examined the problems of library cooperation among Francophone and Anglophone West African countries and concluded that it would be more economical and more efficient to continue to use the services provided by the Bibliotheque Nationale and the British Lending Library. However, a plan has been set up to produce a Union List of Serials in West African university libraries.
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RESOURCE SHARING IN WEST AFRICA:
SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICIES

by

G. M. Sheriff

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RESOURCE SHARING IN WEST AFRICA:
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by G.M. SHERIFF

Paper presented at the IFLA/UNESCO Pre-
Session Seminar for Developing Countries on
"Resource Sharing of Libraries in
Developing Countries"
29 August - 3 September, 1977.

The purpose of this Paper is to briefly examine the current state of library co-operation in some West African countries (Francophone and Anglophone) in relation to the implementation of National Information policies in these countries. The topic of this paper was originally conceived as a modest contribution towards the promotion of the NATIS notion as a practical step in the direction of a more rationalised development of libraries, archives, and documentation infrastructures in developing countries.

However, since the UNESCO General Conference at its 19th Session held in Nairobi had adopted on 22 November 1976, Resolution 5 which approved the principles of a General Information Programme; and since the Director General of UNESCO has implemented this Resolution by creating on 24 February, 1977, the Division of the General Information Programme, it seems logical that any examination of National Information policies should take into account this new arrangement. The new UNESCO Division regroups most activities of the two former UNESCO Divisions of Documentation, Libraries and Archives (NATIS), and of Scientific and Technological Documentation and Information (UNISIST). It seems necessary also that the activities of the General Information Programme should be stated here, so that it can be seen that the purpose and spirit of the New Division is to integrate rather than denigrate the former activities of either NATIS or UNISIST. Both complement each other in reality.

The New Division intends to:

- Promote the formulation of information plans at the national, regional and global level;
- further the establishment and application of methods and norms and their dissemination;
- contribute to the development of information infrastructures and specialised information systems and;
- promote the training and education of information specialists and information users with particular attention to the needs of developing countries especially as regards the transfer and exchange of information with a view to economic and social development.

In an attempt to broadly relate the above objectives to the West African situation it could be said that UNESCO's greatest task and finest hour will be realised when perhaps more practical ways and means are developed for the implementation of the development of national information policies on the national level. After two years of NATIS in infancy a new model has now emerged which we hope will direct the furtherance of the practicalities of implementing the development of information systems (policies) in developing countries.

While it is an accepted truism that the ideas of Information System Development cannot be forced upon any developing country by UNESCO, it could be also validly accepted that those countries which want to develop model Information Systems should be given priority assistance in this regard. In this respect it is my considered view that the UNESCO National Commission^s should be strengthened on request, with field personnel who are not the usual specialist experts, who visit countries and write reports which are rarely implemented, but "follow-up people" who can assist with implementation. One of the problems of NATIS seems to have been the lack of infrastructures for implementation. Delegates at some of the meetings intended to promote the ideas of NATIS seemed to ^{have} emerged with long shopping lists for

UNESCO's financial support rather than solutions to problems like: How could NATIS be implemented within a restructured, re-orientated National Information Policy.

It had been mentioned earlier on, that both NATIS and UNISIST complement each other. This statement is true of the developing countries where it seems safer to have the more general development precede the specialised system as demonstrated by the technological implications of UNISIST. In many developing countries where basic information resources are in short supply and where the basic technological support are lacking or underdeveloped - intermittent power supplies, absence of maintenance facilities, for example, lack of expertise and purchasing power for spare parts of machinery, it seems logical that one should advocate the development of a general Information System followed by or associated with the more specialised systems which though essential cannot be easily supported within the framework of the present economic systems of many of the West African developing countries, excluding Nigeria.

Two cases illustrative of current situations in two West African countries can support the position described in this basic assumption relative to the use of technology in developing countries. In the National Archives of Ghana can be found some of the most expensive equipment lying in disrepair and disuse owing to lack of foreign currency purchasing power for the acquisition of spare parts. And in Accra like most West African cities, unpredictable power cuts and load-shedding are not uneventful occurrences. The National Archives of the Ivory Coast has a different situation. There the infrastructure was originally created as a UNESCO Model which was first developed as an ideal situation with an ongoing sound basic structure, to which, with time has been added Automatic Data Processing facilities. The later though operating co-operatively through shared-time computer services is quite an expensive programme which very few West African libraries and archives can afford to maintain at their level and stages of economic development.

It must be emphasized that the illustrations given are not in support of a total exclusion of the use of Technology in West African countries, but rather a realistic evidence that most developing countries in this region are finding the cost of maintenance of basic infrastructures rather prohibitive in view of current inflation and other inherent economic factors not conducive to the maintenance of reasonable standards. In consequence of these conditions, standards will continue to deteriorate in countries which once had flourishing libraries, archives and Documentation Centres, unless timely intervention is made, by introducing National Information policies which would be given the necessary national priority.

Within the context of the development of National Information Systems most countries in West Africa seem to lack a co-ordinated national policy which would involve all types of Information Agencies. All too often, one finds that within a country, the affairs of Archives are under the direction of the Head of State's office or some other ministry, while those of Libraries are looked after by a different one. Or even where all Information Agencies are administered by one ministry, each organisation is treated separately with no intention of relating their activities as complements of a national system. For this reason and as already ^{been} stated earlier, there needs to be an emphasis on buttressing the UNESCO National Commissions in each developing country with expertise which could ^{help} develop an integrated Information System. How this could best be done, should be by influencing the role and objectives of the Information System Section of each commission. In other words, Commissions in these countries should be encouraged to establish a Division responsible for the development of Information Systems, with a view to organising and sharing national resources.

Resource sharing or library co-operation as has been widely acknowledge is not an innovation. What is new, are the innovative, imaginative and practical methodology used for implementation.

New types of problems have emerged within the context of library co-operation and new solutions are being devised to solve them. Library co-operation within the framework of a National Information Policy in a developing country may be interpreted to mean the primary responsibility of each library to a national input of resources. In this regard, it seems to be a sharing or segmenting of a national cake (financial resources) among interested parties which perform essential, related and co-ordinated national functions. Naturally, this operation will also be closely linked with the objectives of each organisation in the system. Thus, it could be perceived that university and college libraries could serve as National Reference and Research libraries; public libraries as National Lending Libraries, specialised libraries as Documentation Centres supporting the research libraries in relation to their special fields; and archives exploiting original sources.

Whereas, in the developed countries there are long established institutions with enormous resources and vested interests, in most developing countries, Libraries, Documentation and Archives are new. The development of a public library movement began in Anglophone West Africa in 1962 with the Enugu Conference in Nigeria. In the Francophone countries this system is still in its evolutionary stages. The prevailing situation therefore needs a modelling and orientation fashioned according to the needs of each nation rather than being based on norms and patterns of development which had been used by the developed countries. Those ingredients which were good and essential for the development of a Library of Congress in the United States, or a British Museum in Great Britain, may not be relevant to the needs of the Upper Volta with its newly established university library (1973); with less than basic resources in support of its courses; (in 1975 the university library consisted of 18,000 volumes of books and periodicals, 120 current periodicals and 280 maps) and no public library system; and where the public's library interests are being served by the French Cultural Centre and the United States Information Services. The former

entering for children and the later for adults. However, each of these two libraries are heavily weighted towards the promotion of their national culture as a matter of priority. Therefore, if in the course of the furtherance of these cultural objectives the Public Library interests of the Voltaics are satisfied this does not necessarily reflect the policy of neither the French nor the American government.

On the contrary, it must be pointed out, that whereas in the former British colonies, the British, through its British Council Offices developed positive policies towards the promotion of British Culture through the creation of British Council libraries which later formed the basis of public library infrastructures, in the Francophone countries such an agency like the British Council does not exist. For, even after Independence had been attained in many of these countries, the British Council has continued its library development policy through Book Presentation Programmes, staff, and consultants in pursuit of supporting library infrastructures. Perhaps, this could be interpreted as a continuance of neo-colonialism. Nevertheless, in most developing countries where the library development or national information system cannot be regarded as a priority because of financial constraints, there can be little doubt that a gap is being bridged until the place of the development of a national information system is clearly defined within the framework of the National Plan of many of these countries in West Africa.

There can be no doubt that Resource Sharing is an essential need, alike in the developed and developing countries of the modern world. In the developed, perhaps because, there is an oversupply of "materials", and in the developing countries due to a lack of the basic resources.

University libraries in most West African developing countries are on the whole more developed than other types of libraries. Though some of the newer university libraries in Nigeria have higher rates of acquisition than those in Sierra Leone and Ghana, the latter are considered to have richer collections in the older types of research

materials. West African universities, therefore, through the Standing Conference of University Libraries (Eastern Area) (SCULWA) have, at two of their conferences sought to examine the problems of library co-operation among their members, Francophones and Anglophones.

After long deliberations and careful consideration it was generally agreed that in order to foster an effective co-operative library scheme, certain pre-requisite conditions need to be fulfilled. Some of these include:

- the building up of basic collections;
- an organized exchange of library accession lists (these are sometimes used by many African university libraries as selection tools);
- compilation of national bibliographies and enactment of copyright laws in countries where they do not exist;
- establishment of co-operative links between university libraries, national libraries, archives and documentation centres within each country;
- installation of microfilming facilities within at least one unit of the national information system of a country;
- acquisition of computer facilities;
- improvement in postal and communication systems within and outside African countries;
- publication of lists of staff publications;
- publication of lists of serials catalogues initially to be followed by union lists of periodicals and books.

Co-operative activities which could therefore be developed in view of our

- (a) exchange of library materials
- (b) inter-library loans
- (c) co-operative acquisition and storage programmes
- (d) staff exchange.

On library exchange, it should be noted that most West African university libraries as of now have established library material exchange programmes with libraries within and outside Africa. Where newly established universities were faced with rather bleak acquisition prospects and scarce means, it was essential to pursue vigorous exchange programmes in order to augment purchases. It was also customary for these universities to buy local materials when no university publications were available and offer them to foreign libraries as materials for exchange. The Exchange Department was often a part of the Orders Department; and in times of foreign exchange currency crisis, a carefully organized Exchange Programme acquired foreign materials which could not have otherwise been obtained. Some developed countries have sometimes been quite liberal towards libraries in developing countries and they have on some occasions not demanded a pro-rata exchange arrangement.

In Sierra Leone, the Public Archives, in its routine examination and organization of Records offices in various ministries and departments acquire duplicate copies of printed Sierra Leone materials, which are offered to foreign libraries in exchange for unexposed microfilm reels. The response to this programme has been most encouraging, and where libraries cannot offer microfilms, materials requested have been sold for cash. The purpose of this programme is to acquire microfilms and other materials for the maintenance of work for its Documentation Unit, equipment for which was, originally, provided by UNESCO.

Inter-library loan programmes have proved to be more difficult to establish largely because of communications problems and lack of bibliographical tools. It has been agreed that loans between West African countries take a longer time than those between an African state and the Bibliothéque Nationale or the British Lending Library. The cost of photocopying in African countries could be quite prohibitive owing to the high import duty imposed on photographic paper and chemicals. For these reasons, apart from instituting inter-library

lends within the institutions in one country, it was considered to be more economic and more efficient to continue to use the services provided by the Bibliothèque Nationale for the francophone countries and the British Lending Library for the anglophone.

Lends could therefore be limited to the local materials produced in each country, and materials published outside Africa which could neither be obtained from Paris nor Boston Spa. Meanwhile, a Union List of Serials in West African university libraries forms a major project for the Standing Conference of African University Libraries.

This Union List will be based on national union lists of serials of university and college libraries located in each member country, and should be produced by each country against the next Conference which will be held in Kampala, Uganda in April 1979. The University of Thabon has already offered to produce the West African Union List using its computer facilities which are highly developed and sophisticated. Where possible National Union Lists will be produced by committee.

That many of the West African university libraries are lacking in basic bibliographic sources for verification of citations on inter-library loan slips, had to be appreciated by the other libraries of the Conference. Very few university libraries stocked all the major national bibliographies, of Britain, France, United States, and Germany and catalogues of major libraries. Very few countries within the region also regularly produced national bibliographies.

The discussion of the actual operation of Inter-library loans among member libraries seemed to have been centred on the use of a standard loan slip which could be understood by all. It was, therefore agreed that the International library loan slip used by UNESCO and other agencies could be used for this purpose.

The question of postage for materials sent on loan was inconclusively debated. Though most members felt that during the informal operation of the scheme no refund of postage should be demanded.

It is hoped that a Special Bibliography Unit project will be introduced by the Government on the completion of the first African Union list of books. This scheme, as it develops, could combine the introduction of books and other non-printed means of communication in order to develop a wider and highly efficient book system within a reasonable budget.

Summative evaluation and storage programmes are fraught with problems of finance and otherwise due to the limitations of a limited library. These programmes are better operated within universities than outside them. For example, the Nigerian university libraries have a joint programme for the acquisition of African Government publications with Lagos University Library collecting those from elsewhere. For the development of such programmes, it has been suggested that libraries could develop national collections relative to different countries rather than developing general African collections as was practicable in the 1950s and 1960s. The University of Lagos Library has in the past attempted to develop a national collection which includes mainly African books, journals, and those on Africa, Africa, Africa and African Studies. Such collections will enhance library cooperation within a limited area, thereby facilitating the provision of difficult communication and transportation involved within the region.

Staff exchange programmes are still undeveloped partly because of financial limitations. But African university libraries could therefore have to use the staff exchange programmes of agencies like the Association of African Universities in order to further their programme. These agencies have already developed similar staff exchange programmes for the benefit of academic staff of African university libraries.

Staff exchange programmes between Government and independent libraries should be considered most essential for the promotion of human understanding and better relationships between independent libraries, and for the development of human or allied professions.

techniques. While it was felt that the exchange of senior library staff between libraries might pose problems of salary equivalencies, housing and allowances, the exchange demands of junior staff seem to have been less complex. University librarians seem to have agreed that the junior staff exchange programme should be further carefully investigated with a view to implementation.

There is no lack of goodwill among West African librarians for the establishment of library co-operative schemes of national and international status. What seems to be lacking is the machinery for implementation which involves a national financial commitment. If in a National Information System a university library performs the function of the National Reference and Research Library, then its resources are automatically made available to all users of its nation. If such a university library develops a co-operative scheme with libraries outside it, there follows, an international involvement which should be recognised by all libraries, archives and documentation centres of the national system, as an international source of enrichment of their national resources.

However, within the context of the current situation in West Africa, the pattern of development postulated would owe its birth and effective survival within the framework of a well designed, carefully contrived National Information Policy which would provide, most essentially, the necessary budget.

MRS G. M. SHERIFF
LIBRARIAN
FOURAH BAY COLLEGE
LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA
LEONE
FREETOWN.

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